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## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of transferring a file from a first client associated with a first subscriber to a communications system to a second client associated with a second subscriber to the communications system, the method comprising:

connecting from the first client to a communications system host;

sending, through the communications system host, a request to the second client to establish a direct connection to the second client;

when the second client accepts the request, establishing a direct connection to the second client that bypasses the communications system host; and transferring a file over the direct connection.

- 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the request is authenticated by the communications system host.
- 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the second client accepts the request based on indicated preferences of the second subscriber.
- 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the direct connection is initiated by the second client.
- 5. The method of claim 1, wherein the direct connection to the second client is established using an IP address of the second client.
- 6. The method of claim 1, further comprising displaying a graphical user interface indicating that a direct connection to the second client is established.
- 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the communications system host comprises an instant messaging host.
- 1 8. The method of claim 1, wherein the file comprises a data file.
- 9. The method of claim 1, wherein the file comprises a text file.

- 10. The method of claim 1, wherein the file comprises a graphics file.
- 1 11. The method of claim 1, wherein the file comprises an audio file.
- 1 12. The method of claim 1, wherein the file comprises a video file.

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- 13. The method of claim, 1, wherein the direct connection is a socket connection.
- 1 14. A method of transferring a file from a first client associated with a first subscriber to a communications system to a second client associated with a second subscriber to the communications system, the method comprising:

connecting from the second client to a communications system host;

receiving, through the communications system host, a request from the first client to establish a direct connection;

accepting the request from the first client;

establishing a direct connection to the first client that bypasses the communications system host; and

receiving a file over the direct connection.

- 15. The method of claim 14, wherein the request is authenticated by the communications system host.
- 1 16. The method of claim 14, wherein accepting the request is based on indicated preferences
- of the second subscriber.
- 17. The method of claim 14, further comprising initiating the direct connection.
- 18. The method of claim 14, wherein the direct connection is established by the first client
- 2 using an IP address of the second client.
- 19. The method of claim 14, further comprising displaying a graphical user interface
- 2 indicating that a direct connection to the first client is established.

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- 1 20. The method of claim 14, wherein the communications system host comprises an instant
- 2 messaging host.
- 1 21. The method of claim 14, wherein the file comprises a data file.
- 1 22. The method of claim 14, wherein the file comprises a text file.
  - 23. The method of claim \( 4, \) wherein the file comprises a graphics file.
- 1 24. The method of claim 14, wherein the file comprises an audio file.
- 1 25. The method of claim 14, wherein the file comprises a video file.
- 26. The method of claim 14, further comprising receiving an indication that the first subscriber using the first client is composing a message.
- 27. The method of claim 26, further comprising receiving the message composed by the first subscriber from the first client.
  - 28. The method of claim 14, wherein the direct connection is a socket connection.
- 29. An apparatus for transferring one or more files from a first client associated with a first subscriber to a communications system to a second client associated with a second subscriber to the communications system, the apparatus comprising a first client configured to:
  - connect from the first client to a communications system host;
  - send through the communications system host a request to the second client to establish a direct connection to the second client;
  - when the second client accepts the request, establish a direct connection to the second client that bypasses the communications system host; and
- 9 transfer a file over the direct connection.

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1	30. An apparatus for transferring one or more files from a first client associated with a first
2	subscriber to a communications system to a second client associated with a second subscriber
3	to the communications system, the apparatus comprising a second client configured to:

connect from the second client to a communications system host;

receive, through the communications system host, a request from the first client to establish a direct connection;

accept the request from the first client;

establish a direct connection to the first client that bypasses the communications system host; and

receive a file over the direct connection.

31. A computer program, stored on a computer readable medium for transferring a file from a first client associated with a first subscriber to a communications system to a second client associated with a second subscriber to the communications system, comprising instructions for:

connecting from the first client to a communications system host;

sending, through the communications system host, a request to the second client to establish a direct connection to the second client;

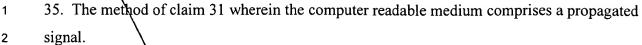
when the second client accepts the request, establishing a direct connection to the second client that bypasses the communications system host; and

transferring a file over the direct connection.

- 32. The method of claim 31 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a disc.
- 33. The method of claim 31 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a client 1 device. 2
- 34. The method of claim 31 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a host 1 device. 2



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36. A computer program, stored on a computer readable medium for transferring a file from a first client associated with a first subscriber to a communications system to a second client associated with a second subscriber to the communications system, comprising instructions for:

connecting from the second client to a communications system host;

receiving, through the communications system host, a request from the first client to establish a direct connection;

accepting the request from the first client;

establishing a direct connection to the first client that bypasses the communications system host; and

receiving a file over the direct connection.

- 37. The method of claim 37 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a disc.
- 38. The method of claim 37 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a client device.
- 39. The method of claim 37 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a host device. 2
- 40. The method of claim 37 wherein the computer readable medium is a propagated signal. 1
- 41. A method of communicating between a first client associated with a first subscriber to a 1 communications system and a second client associated with a second subscriber to the 2 communications system, the method comprising: 3
- connecting from the second client to a communications system host; 4
  - establishing a direct connection to the client that bypasses the communications system host;

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receiving an indication that the first subscriber using the first client is composing a 7 message; and 8

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- receiving the message composed by the first subscriber from the first client.
- 42. The method of claim 41, wherein the indication comprises a text message.
- 43. The method of claim 41, wherein the indication comprises an icon.
- 44. The method of claim 41, wherein the communications system host comprises an instant messaging host.